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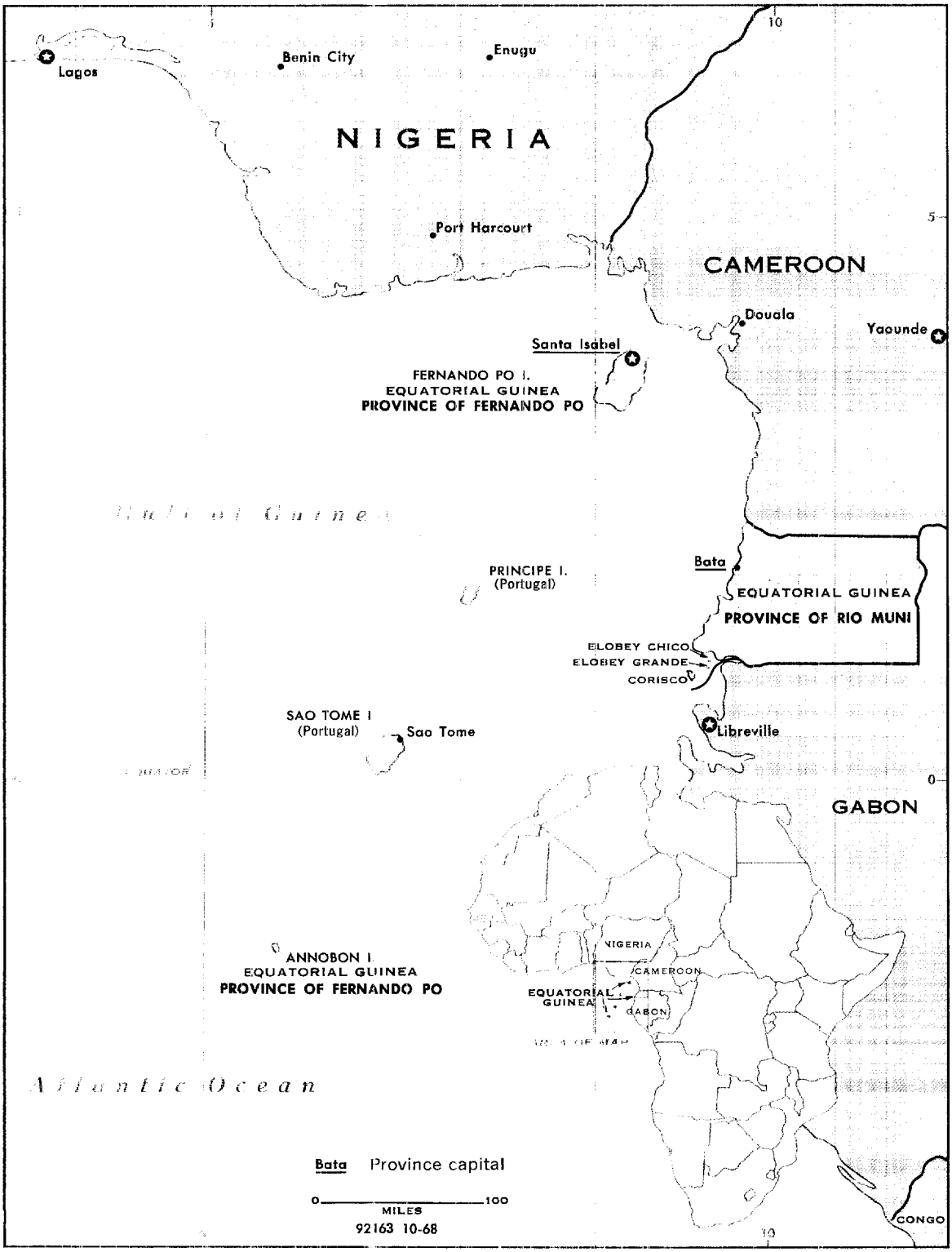
EQUATORIAL GUINEA: MISMATED MINI-STATE

Equatorial Guinea, a small Spanish dependency on the west coast of Africa, is scheduled to become independent on 12 October. Although it has exercised limited powers of self-government since 1964, when Spain granted it autonomy, the new state faces a difficult and uncertain future.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will join two geographically distinct provinces with little in common except a history of Spanish sovereignty. The road to independence has been fraught with controversy over what form the union of the two provinces should take, or, indeed, whether it should even be undertaken. Although Guinea's Spanish-drafted independence constitution has been approved in a national referendum, few Guinean leaders find it satisfactory, and most, with Spanish encouragement, view it merely as a vehicle for independence. Spain has done little to foster the development of either the strong leaders or the strong nationalist party that might assure the welding of the two disparate provinces into a national unit. Even if Guinea's inexperienced government is able to accomplish this formidable task, the new nation's viability will be dependent upon the continued willingness of Spain to underwrite its economy.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA



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Equatorial Guinea's Unequal Partners

The two provinces of Equatorial Guinea are a study in disparity. Relative to each other, Rio Muni is large, poor, backward, inaccessible and of minor concern to Spanish political and commercial interests, while Fernando Po is compact, comfortable, developed, well situated, and the cynosure of Spanish landowners and entrepreneurs, both resident and absentee.

Rio Muni consists of a densely forested mainland area sandwiched between Gabon and Cameroon, and three tiny offshore islands, Corisco, Elobey Chico, and Elobey Grande. Over 80 percent of the estimated 270,000 native inhabitants of Equatorial Guinea live in Rio Muni. With the exception of the Playeros or "beach people"--the collective name for members of several small coastal tribes--most mainlanders are Fang, a dynamic tribal group that is also found in Cameroon and Gabon. The only significant nonindigenous inhabitants of the province are the several thousand Spaniards and Nigerian contract laborers engaged in the large lumbering industry.

The second province, Fernando Po, takes its name from the largest island in the Gulf of Guinea, some 20 miles off the coast of Cameroon, and also includes the smaller island of Annobon, 370 miles to the southwest. Its indigenous population, estimated at roughly 50,000 on the basis of a recent Spanish census, consists primarily of Bubis, the oldest known inhabitants of the islands, and of smaller groups of Fernandinos--descendants of liberated slaves from British West Africa--and immigrants from the mainland. About 4,500 Europeans, most of them Spanish landowners and civil servants, and some 50,000 contract laborers from Nigeria also live in Fernando Po.

Although their common Spanish cultural heritage somewhat mitigates the ethnic dissimilarity of the inhabitants of the two provinces, it also creates differences. Spaniards have been present both longer and in greater numbers in Fernando Po. While the Spanish Government's effort to provide educational and health facilities for Equatorial Guinea has been exceptional--as demonstrated by the dependency's high literacy rate--the program focused first on the island and only recently has penetrated the jungles of the mainland. Thus the more westernized islanders tend to look down on their mainland neighbors as primitive or unsophisticated.

The economic disparity between the two provinces is particularly marked. The Guinean economy as a whole is based almost exclusively on cocoa, timber, and coffee. Cocoa, the largest export earner, is grown on Fernando Po on plantations owned by Spaniards or Fernandinos and worked by Nigerians. Per capita income on Fernando Po is about $250; in Rio Muni it is about $100. Although many islanders, like most mainlanders, still live in the subsistence economy, they are the primary beneficiaries of the Spanish investment in social and

economic development. Over the past few years Fernando Po has contributed about two thirds of the Guinean budget and has received about one third of the expenditures.

The less developed Rio Munian economy rests primarily on timber and coffee production. The dense rain forests of Rio Muni, Gabon, and Congo (Brazzaville) yield virtually all of the world production of okoume wood, from which plywood is made. Lumbering activities are controlled by the Spanish. Coffee production, which contributes less than one quarter of export earnings, is largely in African hands.

The Guinean economy has been heavily dependent on help from Spain. Spanish aid has been necessary to balance the budget, develop the socioeconomic infrastructure, and provide technical assistance. In addition to subsidizing Guinean exports, of which some 97 percent go to Spanish markets, Spain supplies about two thirds of the country's imports. In 1967 Spanish support totaled about $14 million, equivalent to about 35 percent of Equatorial Guinea's gross domestic product.

The Bumpy Road to Independence

Equatorial Guinea's path to independence has been filled with disputes among and between Spanish officials and Guinean politicians. The conflicts have covered a wide range of topics, from the timing of independence to the form of government for the new state and the type of ties to be established with the former colonial power. Although some apparently have been resolved, others remain a threat to the stability of the independent state.

Spain, apparently in response to growing world pressure for decolonization, announced in 1963 that it would grant autonomy and limited self-government to Equatorial Guinea. The Spanish initiative may have been hailed throughout the rest of the world, but it was not wholly popular in Guinea. Although the basic law of 1963 establishing the autonomous government won an over-all majority in a popular referendum, over 50 percent of the registered voters in Fernando Po and more than a third in Rio Muni rejected the proposal. The autonomous government, elected early in 1964, was composed largely of moderate officials who worked closely with Spanish authorities. Because of their ties to the Spanish and their lack of initiative, the officials earned the criticism of more militant Guinean nationalists, most of whom were in exile until quite recently.

During the period of local autonomy a dispute over the future of Equatorial Guinea raged within the Spanish Government. The disagreement, which was only thinly veiled from the public, apparently involved opposing forces headed by Foreign Minister Castiella and Vice President Carrero Blanco. Castiella, reportedly the prime mover behind the decision to grant autonomy, advocated early independence. Concerned with Spain's position in the UN, where he hoped to gain support for the return of Gibraltar to Spain, Castiella

urged that Guinea become independent as a single unit, as the UN General Assembly had requested in December 1966.

Carrero Blanco urged a more cautious course, possibly out of concern for personal financial interests which he and other government officials allegedly have in Fernando Po. He sought consistently to delay independence and to ensure a bipartite Guinea in which Fernando Po would have a high degree of autonomy and insulation from Rio Muni.

Within the richer island province there developed a vocal group of separatists who, perhaps with the encouragement of Spanish colonial officials, loudly rejected proposals for a unified, independent Equatorial Guinea. Some of them even advocated that Rio Muni be granted independence but that Fernando Po remain attached to Spain.

In October 1967 Spain convened in Madrid a conference which included representatives of the Spanish Government and of all major nationalist and ethnic groups in Guinea to prepare the way for independence. The participants apparently reached a stalemate after only nine sessions, and the conference was adjourned. It was reconvened in April 1968 and, after working two months and weathering several reportedly stormy sessions, finally produced a draft constitution. As the conference closed there were unconfirmed reports that as many as 23 of the 44 Guinean delegates to the conference disapproved of the draft constitution. Several of the delegates carried their complaints to the Committee of 24 on Decolonization, the UN body which monitors independence processes.

Most Guinean leaders, however, urged an affirmative vote on the draft constitution when it was submitted to a referendum last August. Spanish officials acknowledge that they advised the Guineans to use the constitution as a vehicle for independence and to revise it later if they wished. The constitution was approved by a majority of voters in both provinces.

The Constitution and Its Critics

The Spanish-drafted constitution attempts to assure the unity of the new state by protecting the interests of the potentially secessionist province of Fernando Po. It provides for a president with strong executive powers, but allows the provinces considerable autonomy in administrative and social affairs, which are under the jurisdiction of elected provincial councils. At the national level Fernando Po is accorded representation far out of proportion to its small number of inhabitants. Either the president or the vice president whom he appoints must be a native of Fernando Po, as must at least one third of the members of the cabinet. This smaller province also holds one third of the seats in the national legislature and one half of the seats in the Council of the Republic, a body which has broad powers of judicial review and mediates disputes between the executive and

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legislative branches of the government and between the national and provincial governments.

More important to Fernando Po than its numerical representation in the government are the constitutional provisions on allocation of federal funds. They provide that expenditures which are of greater or exclusive benefit to one of the provinces will be allocated in proportion to the revenues actually collected in each province. This is a clear concession to the wealthier province, which has feared that it will have to underwrite the whole state financially.

Despite its protection of Fernando Po interests, the constitution did not satisfy some island leaders. In a statement in July 1968 to the UN Committee of 24, Edmundo Bosio Dioco, head of the Fernando Po - based Bubi Union, rejected the draft constitution and requested that Guinea become independent either as two states or in a loose confederation.

Although Fernando Po voters approved the constitution, a large reservoir of separatist sentiment undoubtedly still exists. Most Bubis and Fernandinos fear that independence will bring increasing migration of mainlanders to their more developed island, resulting not only in the loss of their traditionally privileged status but in their absorption by the more numerous Fang, who have amply demonstrated on the mainland their ability to overwhelm smaller tribes.

Other critics have complained that the constitution grants too much autonomy to the provinces and that it will tend to perpetuate Spanish influence in the new nation. The most vocal proponents of this position have been members of the Joint Secretariat, a group formed by members of all three major nationalist parties after the first constitutional conference faltered. Its spokesman, Francisco Macias Nguema, also appeared before the Committee of 24 in July. Although the Joint Secretariat initially purported to speak for the three nationalist parties, its activities were subsequently disavowed by many party members, and two of the parties presented their own presidential candidates in the recent elections.

Elections

National elections, held on 22 and 29 September, were the final step in the independence process. Voting was restricted to Guinean nationals and was monitored by a UN observer team. The first election filled the seats in the national and provincial legislatures. Because none of the four presidential candidates received the required absolute majority of the vote in the first contest, a runoff was held a week later.

Of the four presidential candidates, two--Bonifacio Ondo Edu and Atanasio Ndong Miyone--were sponsored by Guinean nationalist parties. Ondo, who served as president of the autonomous

government, was the candidate of the moderate Movimiento de Union Nacional de la Guinea Ecuatorial (MUNGE), the principal party of the autonomous government, while Ndong represented the somewhat more nationalist Movimiento Nacional de Liberacion de la Guinea Ecuatorial (MONALIGE). Edmundo Bosio Dioco was the candidate of the ethnically based Bubi Union, and Joint Secretariat spokesman Macias, a dissident member of MONALIGE, apparently was placed in nomination through petition of two percent of the electorate.

Macias, whose name headed several lists, and Ondo were winners in the first contest, with 39 and 34 percent of the total vote, respectively. Ndong received 20 percent. There are indications that Spain, despite its close cooperation with MUNGE during the autonomous period, favored Ndong over Ondo in the first contest, presumably believing that Ndong's stronger nationalist credentials might earn for him greater cooperation from the Guinean people. Ndong, who returned to Equatorial Guinea in 1966 after a long period of exile, has not had close relations with Spain. He did, however, defend the work of the constitutional conference before the Committee of 24 in July and was accused by more militant Guineans of "selling out to the Spanish."

After his defeat in the initial elections, Ndong, perhaps hoping to repair his nationalist image, asked his supporters to vote for Macias in the runoff. One unconfirmed report speculated that Ndong's reward would be a ministerial post in the Macias government and said that Ondo had unsuccessfully attempted to block this trade. Macias defeated Ondo in the second contest.

Outlook

Equatorial Guinea's political future--including its continued existence as a single unit--is uncertain. Although Macias served as vice president of the autonomous government, he is largely an unknown quantity. He will be working within an untested governmental structure which he has strongly criticized. He apparently has not yet outlined the policies he will pursue as president but he may feel forced to maintain the independent, nationalistic position which, though it may have been no more than a campaign tactic, presumably earned him the approval of the Guinean electorate. The new president has been characterized as strong-willed, emotional, and erratic, with few abiding convictions. He has not yet demonstrated any ability to compromise and conciliate, presidential skills which may be vital to Equatorial Guinea's stability.

Although Spain has indicated its willingness to assist Equatorial Guinea in its transition to independence, the agreements which will serve as the basis for future Spanish-Guinean relations have not yet been negotiated. One Spanish official recently said, in effect, that his government would not unilaterally guarantee the new state's territorial integrity against attack. His own view was that Equatorial Guinea

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would rather look toward the UN as the guarantor of its integrity.

Barring the discovery of exploitable mineral resources, Equatorial Guinea's prospects for economic growth are poor. Oil prospecting is presently in process, but oil has not yet been found in commercial quantities. Cocoa production now uses more than 80 percent of Fernando Po's arable land, leaving little room for expansion. Timber forests being exploited in Rio Muni are expected to be exhausted by 1980 unless intensive reforestation is begun. Forests in the interior have some potential, but the cost of exploitation may be prohibitive. There is some chance for growth of the coffee industry if Spain continues to provide a guaranteed market and if investment funds are found to improve raising and processing practices. Spain's continued willingness to provide financial and technical assistance will be crucial to the nation's economic well-being. [redacted] 25X1

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